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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003600

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC ACCOLADES FOR KING'S WHITE HOUSE MEETING,
BUT SOME QUESTION PRACTICAL IMPACT ON THE GROUND

REF: A. AMMAN 3484

[B](#). AMMAN 3449

[C](#). AMMAN 3148

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b)(d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Jordanians lauded King Abdullah for his May 6 meeting with President Bush, crediting the King with three specific achievements: 1) securing written U.S. guarantees to protect Jordan's interests; 2) encouraging a much-awaited presidential apology for Iraq prison abuse; and 3) influencing the U.S. decision to resume contacts with Palestinian officials. The meeting has bolstered the King at home in the face of rising anti-U.S. sentiment, as well as regionally. The positive spin was deflated slightly, however, by President Bush's public comments two days later that he viewed the goal of establishing a Palestinian state by 2005 as "unrealistic." Contacts warn that the positive momentum from the King's meeting will be lost without concrete follow-up to alter the status quo, and if related issues remain stalled. End Summary.

MEETING BOLSTERS THE KING AT HOME AND REGIONALLY

[1](#)2. (U) Jordanians roundly applauded King Abdullah's May 6 meeting with President Bush, crediting him with effectively advocating the Arab position on Palestine and Iraq and helping balance what they perceive as a lopsided U.S. policy that favors Israel. Press and contacts highlight three specific accomplishments, chief among them the receipt of written U.S. "assurances" seen as akin to those given to PM Sharon promising to protect Jordanian national interests in any final settlement. Jordanians also credit the King (deservedly or not) for eliciting President Bush's "apology" for Iraqi prison abuse, noting that the President had been criticized in Jordan for not apologizing during earlier well-publicized interviews with al-Arabiyya and al-Hurra (ref b). They also believe the King was key in the U.S. decision to restart high-level discussions with Palestinian leaders.

[1](#)3. (C) A Palace official commented to PolCouns on May 9 that the King's media had gone overboard in spinning the positive results of the meeting, adding that he hoped the concrete achievements would not be lost in the hyperbole. The press has given the meeting top billing (including publication and repeated broadcast of the full text of the President's letter), and editorials and commentaries were effusive, lauding the King's "historic" achievements on behalf of all Arabs. Several contacts noted that the meeting bolstered the King's position at home amid rising anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment (refs a and c). In this regard, a former information minister writing in government-aligned al-Rai newspaper used the occasion to defend the U.S.-Jordan relationship, even as Jordanians "reject" many U.S. policies in the region, as vital to preserving Jordan's interests in a dangerous and unpredictable region. The meeting's results are also seen as boosting the King's prestige and credibility in the region at a time when Arab leaders are under fire for their clumsy efforts to influence U.S. policy, contacts added.

AL-AHRAM INTERVIEW MITIGATES POSITIVE SPIN

[1](#)4. (C) An MFA official termed the meeting as a "partial victory," noting the general nature of the letter's language; the Jordanians had hoped for more specific guarantees on certain sensitive final status issues, including the "right of return." Member of Parliament Raed Qaqish told PolOff that he was disappointed that President Bush's letter did not include specific language indicating U.S. opposition to the "transfer" of Palestinians to Jordan. Several contacts suggested the meeting had challenged the widely-held assumption that the U.S. was hopelessly tilted towards Israel, but that the positive impact of the Bush-Abdullah meeting "lost some of its punch" after the President said in an interview with Egyptian daily al-Ahram two days later that the goal of establishing a Palestinian state by 2005 was "not

realistic."

FOLLOW-ON ACTION A MUST

15. (C) Several interlocutors calibrated their positive reaction by emphasizing that there is a very small window of opportunity to move forward, warning that without concrete follow-on action, the positive momentum will quickly dissipate. FonMin Muasher, in Cairo for the Arab League FonMins meeting, sounded this concern when he told Jordan TV on May 8 that no letter of assurances will end the Israeli occupation unless there was serious Arab effort building on the King's meetings. Former Prime Minister Taher al-Masri commented to PolOff that the meeting's positive results have helped the King save face in Jordan (especially since the opposition had doubted he would return home with anything to show for his efforts), but that he feared the meeting would have no practical impact unless the U.S. pushes Sharon to alter his policies on the ground.

COMMENT

16. (C) The King's Washington trip undoubtedly bolstered the King's image at home as an effective advocate on Palestinian and Iraqi issues at a time when Arab leaders are widely viewed as impotent. It also helped blunt the perception that the U.S. was hopelessly slanted towards Israel. However, the praise may be short-lived if the status quo in the region continues or worsens.

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